



REFLECTIONS

Kabul – Bottled Water Sanitation Assessment #08-018

BY MATTHEW ASADA

Beyond these grey walls lives a city different from mine.
It grows and thrives.
Others tell me of the changes, but I have yet to see them for myself.
I can only remember how it once was, when I could freely leave my home.

The walls keep me safe from those elements deemed threatening.
Threatening, in whose estimation?
What about those longing for my contact?
What about those for whose contact I long?
Every day that I spend inside is another kiss or conversation forgone.

A grease-spattered newspaper floats over the wall.
I smell and feel that it had recently held a piece of flat bread.
I imagine the bread's warmth and taste its buttery flakes with my parched lips.

My lips are parched, not for lack of liquid,
For I have a bountiful supply of bottled water imported from abroad.
Rather, they long for water from the fountain,
Even though I've been warned not to drink from the local well.

I drink from the plastic bottle to keep my body going,
But my mind yearns to sip from the spigot's irregular sputtering.

The empty bottles accumulate in my closet, as the splashes of the fountain grow faint.
The bottled water is clean and pure, but when has life ever been the same?
I trust myself not to break free and leave the compound,
And spend the days and nights drinking from a different bottle,
One smuggled in from the outside.

Bottles surround me and I am close to surrender.
Can I continue living behind these walls, licking my lips to remember the taste of life?
I envision life outside and look forward to one day discarding the bottle
And drinking, once again, from the tap,
Whatever color and texture the water may be.

Matthew Asada joined the Foreign Service in 2003. He recently completed an assignment as a Provincial Reconstruction Team officer in Kunduz and is now serving in Kolkata.

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